

T.R. No.17

(NATIONAL MOVEMENTS IN
EX-COLONIAL DEMOCRACIES
THE NAGA IMPASSE IN INDIA)

Radhika Ramasubban

September 1978

NATIONAL MOVEMENTS IN EX-COLONIAL DEMOCRACIES

THE NAGA IMPASSE IN INDIA

Radhika Ramasubban

Through the discussion of the Naga national movement this paper attempts to highlight the dilemma of a hitherto isolated tribal society which is a latecomer to nationalism. The Nagas have throughout history been an independent people. Consisting of roughly fourteen major tribes with almost fifty subnames and speaking an almost equal number of languages and dialects of the Tibeto-Burman group, they lived in sovereign village states situated on inaccessible mountain peaks and well-fortified against raids from each other,¹ and characterised by a social structure reflecting an incredibly heightened democratic consciousness. The British were the first aliens who penetrated the interior of the Naga hills in the 1820's and in the century that followed, British policy towards these tribes in the frontier region followed a tortuous course which, while it left the traditional Naga socio-economic political structure largely untouched, nevertheless created conditions for far-reaching changes in Naga society and laid the basis for the situation as it has emerged in Nagaland in the contemporary period.

Paper presented at the 9th World Congress of Sociology, Working Group 6 : Nationalism and Ethnic Movements, Session 2 : Third World Countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America. Uppsala, Sweden, August 1978.

When leaving India the British handed over the Naga Hills district to the Indian Government, and before they could consolidate themselves to determine their own future, the Nagas found themselves under the control of a so-called national government which they had had no part in creating and with which they felt no ethnic or historical affinity. The Nagas' contention is that they are not Indians and that Nagaland is not part of India, and that since the British were the only people who conquered them, they should have been allowed to revert to their earlier independent status when the British left India.² They see themselves as not only ethnically different from the mass of the Indian people, but, more important, as having experienced a totally different history which provides no commonality with the rest of India and therefore renders their inclusion into the Indian Union an artificial and forced one. Their demand is for a sovereign Naga nation state comprising the present state of Nagaland and the contiguous Naga-inhabited regions which presently form part of the neighbouring states as well as Burma.³

Their demand for nationhood rapidly moved from the negotiating table to armed struggle. Over the years the Indian

Government has sought to crush the independence movement in this extremely sensitive border region by installing the Indian army and several other para-military and police forces with orders to destroy the rebels. The army occupation of Nagaland has continued, and the Armed Forces Regulation Act has been in existence denying the Nagas even elementary civil rights; and there are a reported 96,000 uniformed security men in a state where the total adult male population is not more than 100,000.⁴ The twenty-five years of army repression has resulted in splits within the underground and depletion of their ranks, the resigned acceptance by many Nagas that there is perhaps no alternative to functioning within the Indian Union although they find the formal statehood conferred by the Indian Government unacceptable without important reservations, and a demonstration on the part of the underground of their willingness to negotiate a peaceful solution to the Naga political situation provided the army and para-military forces are withdrawn from Nagaland.

The understanding of the Naga dilemma is embedded on the one hand in the history of colonial rule, and on the other, in the complex interrelationships between the four

major parties representing the Government of India, the State Government of Nagaland, the underground Naga Federal Government and Naga society.

Colonial Rule

Colonial policy kept the Nagas isolated and undeveloped and particularly insulated them from even the echoes of the political movements taking place in the rest of British India through a set of Regulations which in the liberal terminology were meant to "protect" the Nagas. Even within this isolation any development in the direction of a unified political organisation was pre-empted by the fragmentation of the Naga-inhabited areas in the interests of political and administrative expediency. It was due to this absence of a common political organisation that the Nagas never raised the demand for independence from Britain. An independence movement in Nagaland parallel to the Indian national movement would have resulted in some common ground for political understanding between the Nagas and India.

The colonial policy fell broadly into three main periods: (a) the period of control from without by a system

of expeditions, (b) the period of non-interference and (c) the period of control from within which resulted in the establishment of a stable administration.⁵

The fundamental principle underlying British policy towards the Nagas was the need to prevent their raids upon the fertile plains of Manipur, Assam and Cachar, and the extent to which efforts needed to be made in the direction of controlling them was at all times governed by the criterion of profit. While during the rule of the East India Company the ferocity of the Nagas, poor knowledge of the terrain in the interior of the hills and the expense involved in sustaining punitive expeditions which brought little visible profit to the Company led to only sporadic attempts at control, with the passing of power from the Company into the hands of the Crown, the primary considerations of opening up the Naga foothills bordering on Assam to European tea planters and the commercial exploitation of forest wealth in the region led to a 'forward policy' of establishing administrative control over the whole of India upto the Burmese frontier. The drive to enhance economic exploitation through penetrating Naga territory encountered fierce resistance, but the British

systematically burnt down Naga villages, confiscated terraced fields and dispersed whole populations until they forced their submission. Historically lacking a common organised political authority, Naga resistance consistently fell to the superior firearms and organisation of the British and the war of independence in 1879-80, resulting from the first-ever unification when thirteen Angami village states joined Kohima in an uprising, was foredoomed to failure. Forcible subjection was combined with territorial fragmentation in the administrative (and political) interests of the British. Naga territories were divided between Assam and Manipur, and a Naga Hills district, a segment of the total Naga region, was created in 1881. By the Scheduled Districts Act of 1874 it was declared a 'scheduled' district so that it could be excluded from the general operation of laws in the rest of British India. The policy of "protection" was further crystallised by an Inner Line Regulation (1873) according to which no foreigner could acquire land within the district. Neither the Inner Line Regulation nor the anthropological considerations, however, prevented the British from continuing to truncate the Naga Hills district⁶ every time a new section of the forests

(which came to be called 'reserved' forests) could be carved out and put under Assam for administrative convenience.

From the above discussion we discern the following salient features of colonial policy in this region:

- a) the supreme concern for the economic exploitation of Assam and the Naga foothills for oil, tea and timber;
- b) the division of Naga territories according to economic, political and administrative expediency with little concern for the ethnic homogeneity of the people;
- c) once having isolated the Nagas and bound them down by Regulations, no compulsions remained to expend the resources of the empire on developing the Naga Hills district;
- d) anthropological arguments were used to designate the region a 'scheduled district' (which later on underwent semantic changes in status - 'backward', 'excluded'), leaving the Naga village social structure largely unchanged.⁷ Hence while the rest of India came under the impact of economic development programmes though these were meant primarily to serve the interests of the empire, the Nagas remained in

isolation until missionary influence and the Japanese invasion of north-east India in the second world war shattered this isolation.

The stirrings of nationalism

Certain influences which had entered Naga society during the British occupation were aided by the democratic elements inherent in the traditional Naga social structure⁸ in causing the emergence of a new national consciousness which began to crystallise towards the end of British rule. The missionaries introduced western education whose substantive content made the Nagas aware of the outside world while English enhanced communication among the various tribes; and through the dobashis the Assamese and Manipuri languages penetrated the area. Although the impact of the first world war upon the Nagas was minimal, the few Nagas who had fought in the British army in France, brought back ideas from outside.⁹

These influences led to the forming of the Naga Club in 1928 in search of a new and independent Naga identity. The Club consisted of important village headmen, government

officials and educated persons. The move to transcend narrow tribal loyalties and crystallise a comprehensive Naga identity was a laudable one. But as yet this move did not bring the Naga people into conflict with the British ruler; rather, it sought British protection to save the Nagas from being assimilated by an India whose independence seemed imminent. The Club met the Simon Commission which visited India in 1929 to study the Indian situation for future policy and whose recommendations were to result in the reform contained in the Government of India Act of 1935. The Club's memorandum requested the restoration of Naga independence when the British left India and expressed their opposition to any reforms which might seek to integrate them with the rest of India. The reasons cited were their ethnic distinctiveness and their low level of economic development which, they felt, would result in an unequal relationship in which they would be swamped by the Indian people, their lands seized, their laws and traditions disregarded and their identity obliterated.¹⁰

"For the above reasons, we pray that the British Government will continue to safeguard our rights against all encroachments from other people who

are more advanced than we, by withdrawing our country from the reformed scheme and placing it directly under its own protection. If the British Government, however, wants to throw us away, we pray that we should not be thrust to the mercy of the people who could never have conquered us themselves, and to whom we were never subjugated, but to leave us alone to determine for ourselves as in ancient times".^{11/}

The effectiveness with which the British had insulated the Nagas from the nationalist movement in the rest of the country had shown itself to be complete. Neither had the rest of India any idea of what was happening in Naga Hills, as the Nagas along with many other tribal people were under the direct control of the Governor General and through him the provincial Governor, and events in Naga Hills could never be debated in the legislatures.

Apart from noises about the ethnic distinctiveness of the Nagas, however, the Simon Commission did not seriously consider the Naga demand for self-determination and merely made a semantic change in the Naga position.¹² The hitherto 'backward tracts',¹³ would now be known as 'excluded areas' and 'partially excluded areas'. As the Government of India Act of 1919 had done in the case of the 'backward tracts', the 'excluded' and 'partially excluded' areas were placed

outside the competence of the provincial and federal legislatures, with complete discretionary powers vested with the provincial Governor.¹⁴

The Naga consciousness which was still at an ethnic level due to the historical experience of isolation, received a severe jolt with the second world war when the Naga Hills became an important war arena with the Japanese invasion of India. The rapid improvement of communications linking the Naga Hills with the rest of Burma and India for military needs made the Nagas aware of the nature of economic development and modernisation that had taken place outside their isolated hills and brought home the state of backwardness that British political expediency had kept them in. The thinking was now in the direction of working for a sovereign nation state which would be built on the foundations of traditional Naga democracy and whose precondition would be the unification of the Naga peoples whom the British had divided. Towards this end tribal councils as forums for discussion were organised among all the tribes and in 1941 the Naga National Council (NNC) emerged, consisting of 29 members representing the various tribes on the basis of pro-

portional representation, and financed by contributions from every family, which made every Naga a supporter of the NNC.

The Naga situation, however, contained within itself the limits to its own independent growth. Nationalist aspirations for political sovereignty for a unified Nagaland developed faster than a realistic understanding of whether the indigenous tribal economy could generate the resources to sustain a modern independent nation state under the changed historical circumstances of the post-war period. Freedom from Britain and India was on the agenda, but NNC schemes¹⁵ for the independent Nagas contained provision for a period of 'protection' by Britain or India during which the guardian power would give monetary aid and help launch the 'independent development' of Nagaland, withdrawing at the end of this period to leave the Nagas free to determine their own future.¹⁶

Reinforcing this internal factor, i.e., the historical inheritance of economic backwardness which practically predetermined a steel frame of dependence, there were other external circumstances, the most significant of which was the nature of the ex-colonial, post-war 'democracies', which

were emerging in this period. The inability of a 'democracy' like India to break away from the developmental constraints imposed by colonialism and to itself generate and sustain a dynamic and independent development which would in turn create the conditions for the development of its national minorities, has been the most significant external factor which has contributed to the Naga dilemma.

It is this complex interaction of internal and external factors which has been responsible on the one hand for the shifts in the Naga stand from sovereignty after an interim period of protection, to total independence, to recognition of the right to self determination, to peaceful solution to the Naga political problem; and on the other hand for the Government of India's admission of its impotence to implement a democratic development programme, through its rejection of any peaceful solution which would require Naga consent and voluntary integration into the Indian Union, and its resort to armed repression in order to keep democratic aspirations in check.

The Indian aftermath

Even before the actual transfer of power, in June 1947 the NNC scheme for an interim government assisted by India was negotiated with Sir Akbar Hydari, Governor of Assam, and formalised into what came to be called the Hydari Agreement. While the first eight points pertained, most significantly, to the unification of all the Nagas and the administration of the region in accordance with tribal laws and customs and in collaboration with the Naga National Council, the ninth point pertaining to the period of agreement, ran as follows:

"The Governor of Assam as agent of the government of the Indian Union will have a special responsibility for a period of ten years to ensure the due observance of this Agreement; and at the end of this period, the Naga National Council would be asked whether they require the above agreement to be extended for a further period or a new agreement regarding the future of the Naga people arrived at."^{17/}

By the Indian Independence Act of 1947, however, the Naga Hills district was handed over to India along with the rest of British India. Agitated over this development the NNC sought to express its stand more forcefully through a modification of point nine of the Hydari Agreement to read:

"at the end of this period the Nagas will be free to decide their own future",¹⁸ and communicated to the Indian Government their desire that their right to self-determination after ten years be recognised. The Government of India however maintained that the Nagas as part of British India had now been transferred to free India, that there was no question of self determination now or later and that point nine of the Hydari Agreement could only be interpreted if at all to mean that after a certain period the situation could be reviewed and any minor adjustments within the Indian Union contemplated.

In the meanwhile the Indian Government did not make any significant departures from the earlier colonial policy towards the Nagas. British regulations in the Naga areas, such as the Inner Line Regulation, remained in force. Naga fears that inclusion into the Indian Union would mean minority status within Assam were proved right when the administration of the Naga Hills district was brought under the state government of Assam. The policy of 'exclusion' was accepted though under another name, i.e., the Sixth Schedule under the Constitution, by which they were put on par with the other 'scheduled

tribes' of Assam with no consideration or flexibility for their special status and demands. The division of the Naga areas which the British had wrought in their own interests, continued to be honoured. Further, to acquire those 'unadministered territories' in the border regions which had hitherto enjoyed an ambiguous status, the Indian Government armed itself with the Extra-Provincial Jurisdiction Act of 1947.

The NNC rejected the Sixth Schedule as being contrary to the spirit of the Hydari Agreement and on its part the Indian Government declared the Agreement defunct.

In 1951 on its own initiative, the NNC conducted a plebiscite under the leadership of A.Z. Phizo, wherein the majority of the Nagas opted for independence. The freedom struggle was now launched using the tactics of civil disobedience and peaceful protest, but Naga leaders did not give up attempts to negotiate with New Delhi. The demand was now framed in terms of total independence. Non-acceptance of the Indian constitution, and particularly of the Sixth Schedule, was demonstrated by the boycott of the first general elections in 1952, and in 1953 when the Indian and Burmese Prime Ministers visited the Naga Hills district, the NNC

staged a walk-out of the public meeting in their honour.

The government of Assam declared the situation to be a problem of "law and order". The NNC monthly newspaper was banned as an anti-India propaganda organ. As police outposts in the Naga Hills increased with rapidity and the Assam Rifles and State Armed Police launched a series of raids and arrests, civil disobedience became more widespread. Government servants right down to the village authorities resigned, government functions were boycotted and people refused to provide labour to carry luggage and sell food and supplies to officers and police resulting in regulations being promulgated by the Assam government compelling Naga services,¹⁹ thus further strengthening the threat of Assamese domination. In January 1956 the Assam government declared the Naga Hills a "disturbed area" and the Naga Hills Disturbed Area Ordinance and Assam Maintenance of Public Order Regulation came into force. In the same year under the Defence of India Act the Indian Army moved into Assam, and finally the Special Powers Act gave the authorities maximum flexibility to cope with "law and order" in the region.

The NNC which could not be said to have been taken unawares and which had in its possession considerable stocks of arms and ammunition left behind by the Japanese and British armies, declared the independence of Nagaland, went underground and organised itself for resistance. The Naga Federal Army came to have a general headquarters and three commands - western, eastern and northern; each command consisted of three brigades and each brigade of three battalions. The Naga Federal Government was proclaimed with a President, Parliament and Ministers; each village would be a republic in its own right and each tribe would occupy its own distinct region and exercise authority over its own affairs including land, 3137 community organisations, social and religious practices and customs. Young boys and girls had always been equal working partners in traditional Naga society; the Naga Youth Movement was entrusted with the responsibility of acting as couriers, raising subscriptions from the people and collecting information about the movements of the Indian security forces, while the Naga Women's Society went to work as cooks, nurses and helpers of the underground.

The army repression which destroyed villages, crops,

orchards and granaries, dispersed whole populations into the jungles, took hundreds prisoners, and grouped villages close to army outposts almost in the manner of concentration camps in order to cut off the underground's sources of funds, rations, recruits and shelter, succeeded in creating a break-away section of "moderates" who formed a Naga Peoples Convention²⁰ (NPC) in 1957. The NPC resolved that the political future of the Naga people lay within the Indian Union, and that pending a final solution, the Government of India could constitute the Naga Hills district of Assam, the Tuensang Frontier Division of NEFA, and the reserved forests into a single administrative unit under the External Affairs Ministry. This provided just the right break the Indian Government needed. By the Naga Hills-Tuensang Area Act of 1957, the new arrangement minus the reserved forests came into existence. A second NPC (1958) and a third (1959) culminated in the resolution that the political goal of Nagaland should be a full-fledged state within the Indian Union, and a 16-point draft constitution was drawn up. An important aspect of the draft constitution was the integration of all the Naga inhabited areas not included in the Naga Hills

- Tuensang Area administrative unit, and the preservation of the Naga tribal councils.

The state of Nagaland came into existence in December 1963. There were, however, some significant departures from the 16-point draft constitution drawn up by the NPC. The new Nagaland was merely the reconstitution of the former Naga Hills - Tuensang Area administrative unit, with neither the reserved forests nor the other contiguous Naga areas becoming part of the new state. Neither did the state have its own Governor or High Court. The internal law and order situation continued to remain in the hands of the Governor of Assam rather than with the legally-constituted state government.

That constitutional status within the Indian Union and statehood of this variety were no substitute for Naga aspirations was one argument the Naga Nationalist Organisation (NNO), the ruling party, was hard pressed to counter right from the inception of its career. The NFG refused to accept this nominal statehood which depended on the active presence of the Indian armed forces for its maintenance. Recognising the need for the new government to establish its legitimacy

in such circumstances, the Government of India supported the efforts of a Peace Mission appointed by the Nagaland Baptist Church Council and in May 1964 a ceasefire, which would cover all Naga-inhabited areas, was signed by the underground NFG and the Government of India. On its part the NFG welcomed the ceasefire as an opportunity for a free and wide-ranging discussion of the problem and possibly negotiating a settlement, and as a respite from the intensive security operations against the underground and the village populations.

The Peace Mission drew up a list of proposals in which it urged the Nagas to voluntarily join the Indian Union, and the Government of India to consider ways of meeting the political aspirations and interests of the Nagas to the maximum limit possible in the new signs of peace that had emerged after ten years. The peace talks, however, were deadlocked right from the start. The Indian Government maintained that it would not entertain any demands whose basic premise did not accept Nagaland's constitutional status within the Indian Union. The NFG demanded a recognition of their right to self-determination and to hold another plebiscite under a neutral body's supervision, before they could

proceed to negotiate the form of participation in the Indian Union. The Peace Mission piloted six rounds of talks before it collapsed in 1966,²¹ and in 1968 the Indian Government categorically declared that there was no question of a voluntary merger with India, that the Naga problem had been settled in 1960 (with the decision to grant statehood), and that there was no scope for further talks.

By entering into a ceasefire agreement directly with the NFG, the Indian government had at least acknowledged the status of the NFG as the spokesman for a substantial section of the Naga people. The ruling NNO which had been rejected by the NFG as a stooge and collaborator,²² but which now formed an unavoidable part of the triangular situation, had utilised the years of the ceasefire to establish its legitimacy by exploiting tribal differences to pilot splits within the underground. Between 1956 and 1964, the Semas had largely been in the leadership of the NFG, with the positions of President, Prime Minister and Commander-in-Chief of the federal army in their hands. When the ceasefire was declared in 1964 and negotiations between the Government of India and the underground began, the Sema leadership on the

encouragement of Mr. Hokishe Sema, a prominent NNO leader and staunch NFG opponent, declared themselves ready for a full and final settlement within the Indian Union, provided the Nagas received a "certain weightage". The rest of the NFG opposed this move and deposed them from the NFG leadership. The break-away Semas proclaimed a "Revolutionary Government" and the two rival groups now came to be known as the Zungti and Chedema.²³ Another section which was encouraged to break away formed a "Hongking Group" in Tuensang District. Several members of these break-away groups later joined the Government of India security forces in "flushing out" members of the NFG. Experienced in guerrilla warfare and familiar with the difficult terrain, they were an invaluable asset to the security forces which now assiduously cultivated the Semas.²⁴ These two groups, although recipients of official patronage were, however, encouraged to retain their underground stance.

The split in the underground came to a head in 1968, coinciding with the final impasse in the negotiations. In the general elections of 1969, the NNO returned to power with the active armed protection of the Zungti group, defeating

the only other party, the United Front of Nagaland (UFN) which was known to be sympathetic to the NFG. Significantly, Hokishe Sema was elected Chief Minister. Claiming that the return of the NNO for a second term signified that the turn of events had gone completely against the NFG, Sema launched a purge from the NNO of the various elements who had a record of underground activity and who could be suspected of concealed sympathies for the NFG cause. Prominent among these was the ex-Chief Minister T.N. Angami.

The 1971 mid-term Lok Sabha poll, however, upset the NNO applecart and resulted in a sudden twist to the relative positions of the two parties and to the underground - 'overground' relationship. The sitting member of the NNO, S.C. Jamir, lost Nagaland's only Lok Sabha seat to the leader of the UFN, Capt. A. Kevichusa who was known to be close to Phizo. The defeated NNO member defected to the UFN along with eighteen other dissident NNO MLA's and the four NNO ministers dismissed during the purge. The UFN, now renamed the United Democratic Front (UDF), attempted to break the impasse in which peace negotiations stood by raising a unanimous call in the state Assembly for resumption of talks

between the NFG and the Union Government.²⁵ But Hokishe Sema, who was trying to establish an independent identity for the state government²⁶ pointed out that the NFG was no longer the sole spokesman of the underground and that any further talks should also include the Zungti and Hongking groups as also the state government.

The opposition to Hokishe Sema in the state legislature found its underground expression in the NFG's attempt on his life in August 1972. On August 31, the Government of India banned the political, administrative and military wings of the NFG under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, reinstituted the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Regulation and terminated the eight-year old ban on suspension of army operations. Clear warnings of retribution were sent out to members of the opposition who were giving active support to and had live contact with the underground,²⁷ followed by the arrests of T.N. Angami, S.C. Jamir and three others for their alleged complicity in the attempt on Hokishe Sema's life.

The very attempt to legitimise a state government which was clearly powerless in essence, had led to a further enmesh-

ing of state politics with the underground, with the latter slowly beginning to emerge the more significant force. The triangular situation once again gave way to the naked confrontation between the NFG and the Union Government as army operations gained in intensity.²⁸ The Government of India was now determined to go all out to show who was going to call the tune in Nagaland.²⁹

In February 1974, the Assembly elections brought the UDF to power for the first time. Although it did not secure an absolute majority, the UDF managed to nose ahead of the NNO and form a government with the help of independent MLA's. The most important factor making for the increased popularity of the UDF was its identification with the underground and its pronouncement, the first in Nagaland's history, that the Naga problem was a political one rather than a question of law and order, and must be resolved at that level; its election promise was to press vigorously for the release of all political prisoners and for direct talks between the Union Government and the NFG for a peaceful settlement of the Naga problem.

The UDF, however, was not allowed to continue in office for very long. Defections were engineered to destabilise the

UDF Ministry in the hope that this might afford a chance for the pro-Centre NNO to come to power. When these efforts failed to bear fruit, the Government of India resorted to President's Rule, and on March 22, 1975 the state Assembly was dissolved and Nagaland was brought directly under the Centre. The Emergency which came into effect in June 1975 and continued until March 1977 facilitated the periodical extension of President's Rule during which the army, assisted by the Border Security Forces, Central Reserved Police, Nagaland Armed Police and Assam Rifles, besides minor police units summoned from other states, held full sway.

Six months after the lifting of the Emergency, President's Rule was ended and elections held in Nagaland. In November 1977, the UDF was returned to power with an overwhelming majority and the NNO, which had succumbed to opportunism and merged with the Congress Party during the Emergency, was relegated to the opposition. The UDF under its President Mrs. Rano Shaiza who is Phizo's neice, has reiterated its sympathies for the underground, its determination to steer the renewed peace negotiations to a successful resolution, effect the release of political prisoners, see to the removal

of the Indian army and para-military forces from Nagaland, and bring about the unification of all the Naga peoples.

The Naga impasse

The Indian aftermath reveals two striking features: (a) the Nagas have always been willing to discuss and negotiate with the Government of India, notwithstanding the shifts in their stand regarding their status and the conditions of their merger with the Indian Union and (b) the alacrity with which the Indian Government declared a political problem to be a "law and order" problem has pre-empted the conditions for a peaceful settlement of the question. Violence has been matched with violence and the powerful Indian security forces have had to contend with an underground army deeply entrenched in the sympathies of the people. The Indian Government combined armed repression with democratic postures when it made the move to wean away a section of "moderates" with a promise of full statehood within the Indian Union. But over the years even the state government has not been able to ignore, ostrich-like, the contradictions of its own existence, viz., a virtually parallel political authority in Nagaland,

with a titular state government and an all-powerful Centre which operates through the Governor of the north-eastern region. It is this important reality, that statehood has not been the answer to Naga aspirations as it has failed to secure either autonomy, genuine development or unification of all the Naga peoples, which has changed the relative strength of the two major political parties and brought the pro-underground UDF to power.

However, the constraints upon the UDF's ability to either reverse history or spearhead a fundamental change in the present situation, provides the explanation to the impasse in which the Naga national movement finds itself today. Despite all its proclamations of allegiance to the constitution, the UDF is suspect in the eyes of the Indian Government, the Indian army in Nagaland and the state's bureaucracy (most of whom are on deputation from other states and with little empathy for the local problem). On the other hand, the constraints on the UDF Government of having to work under the Union Government's policy frame constantly overseen by the military and the bureaucracy, limit its effectiveness in meeting the aspirations of the underground and the Naga people as a whole.

The underground on its part has many expectations from the party it helped to bring to power, concretely, at least to steer the negotiations with the Indian Government to a successful resolution and press for the withdrawal of the Indian security forces from Nagaland. The decimation of its ranks and the constant harassment of the people by the security forces compel it to think in terms of peace. But the possibility of any negotiations with the new Janata government at the Centre, that would take into account the original NFG demand was ruled out by the Prime Minister³¹ thus clarifying that the change of government implied no fundamental difference in the approach to the Naga problem.

Where the Naga people are concerned, there is a feeling of oneness with the NFG in their struggle to preserve their cherished traditional democratic institutions and values and ethnic distinctiveness in the face of the armed onslaught from the Union Government and the influx of Marwari traders, contractors and other non-Nagas in the wake of the army operations and enormous expenditure on the army establishment, the heavy Central developmental subsidies and entry of outsider-bureaucrats. This oneness is further inten-

sified by the strong kinship ties that characterise Naga society. Any attempt on the part of the Indian Government to treat the underground as an isolated phenomenon is, therefore, erroneous.

A State structure like India which is on a constant search for markets and symbols of grandeur - as the most important factor in south Asia - and, by virtue of its colonial past, placed in a world context which imposes constraints on its full development and democratic potential, can hardly be expected to be averse to expansionist designs and to suppressing national minorities when its interests demand this. With regard to the Nagas, it cannot afford to give its consent to a plebiscite with uncertain consequences, as the Naga situation, although possessing its own unique features, is part of a wider problem which extends to the entire north-eastern border region and cuts deep into upper Burma, where ethnic, historical and structural factors not dissimilar to the Naga situation in essence, keep the region and its peoples in a state of uneasy ferment. It is because of this constant state of turmoil threatening the lasting interests of the Indian State that even the border

disputes between the Nagaland state government and the Assam state government cannot be resolved in a manner which would meet the interests of the former,³² the issue here being that of the entrenched tea and oil interests which, incidentally, also involve foreign firms.

The question arises whether national movements like the Naga one, seeking to establish independent nation states, have any future in the context of post-war, ex-colonial democracies like India. The Nagas are probably a "nation" in the classical sense, but the historical conditions under which they have awakened to their aspiration for nationhood militate against its fruition. The Naga dilemma, therefore, is clearly a historical and structural one. It was only when colonialism brought the isolated and ethnically distinct Naga society, governed by traditional democratic values, into a union with India that the Nagas awoke to national consciousness. Lacking the wherewithall to realise an independent nation state, their national aspirations have perforce been fettered in a relationship with India, a relationship whose nuances have at all times been governed by the Indian Government's economic and political interests in this strategic border region rather than by the compulsion to satisfy the democratic aspirations of a national minority.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Geographical conditions insulated the Nagas effectively from intrusion from the plains and kept the village states relatively isolated from each other and in extreme cases even one part (khel) of a village from another resulting in the language spoken being unintelligible between villages or even between khels. But it is interesting that culturally, common patterns can be broadly discerned, probably kept alive by the frequent raids carried out by one tribe against another. For excellent ethnographic accounts of the Nagas the reader is referred to Furer-Haimendorf, Elwin (1) and (2), Hutton and Mills, among several others. Christophe Von Furer-Haimendorf, Return to the Naked Nagas, Delhi (1976); Verrier Elwin, Nagaland, Shillong (1961); Verrier Elwin (ed.), The Nagas in the Nineteenth Century, London (1969); J.H. Hutton, The Angami Nagas, London (1921); J.P. Mills, The Lotha Nagas, London (1922).
2. The basis for this claim is that British Policy towards the tribes in what came to be called 'excluded' areas did not bring them into the mainstream of the wider entity 'British India' and therefore these areas could not automatically become part of independent India.
3. The Nagas who are numerically the largest of the several tribes in the north-eastern region today live dispersed in present Nagaland, in the Naga Hills of Manipur, in the North Cachar and Mikir Hills, Lakhimpur, Sibsagar and Nowgong of Assam, in north-east Arunachal Pradesh and in the Somrat tract and its contiguous parts of Burma, a population of more than one million, covering an area of some 20,000 square miles. The present State of Nagaland covers an area of only 6,366 square miles with a population of only 5,15,561. (Census of India 1971).
4. Free Press Journal, (Bombay) 27 November, 1970.
5. The factual details pertaining to the British period are drawn largely from Yunuo and Elwin (1).
Asoso Yunuo, The Rising Nagas, Delhi (1974).

6. Between 1831 and 1924 eleven reserved forests, to facilitate the commercial exploitation of forest wealth, were constituted, carved out of the foothills of the Naga Hills district bordering on Assam and comprising an area of approximately 1,200 square miles. The general management of these forests was kept under the administrative control of the Divisional Forest Officer, Sibsaigar, as the Naga Hills did not have any forest establishment. The British Government acknowledged the Nagas' rights to access in the reserved forests while issuing the notifications; they were given the right of way, right of growing betel leaves, of hunting and fishing, as well as the right to jungle produce like bamboo, canes, palm leaves, etc. There were, however, wide tracts of land between these reserved forests, where the Nagas had been living for centuries in established villages, and cultivating their paddy fields. A final Notification in 1925 lopped off from the Naga Hills district the entire region of the foothills — the reserved forests and the other tracts described above —, which had always been acknowledged as falling within the Naga Hills, to serve administrative convenience in exploiting the forest wealth. The Nagas have never accepted the 1925 Notification based merely on administrative convenience as the basis on which the political boundary between Assam and Nagaland must be demarcated. We will have occasion later to refer to the boundary disputes with Assam arising out of this colonial policy. (Tribune, (Ambala) 10 March, 1971).
7. Village headmen (gaonburas) were given the authority to decide disputes both of civil and criminal nature according to their customary laws, and the customs and traditions of the people were not interfered with. A number of paid interpreters (dobashis), however were appointed by the government from among the people in the courts of the Deputy Commissioner and sub-divisional officers to help them in deciding the disputes of the district and generally form a link between the people and the administrative authorities. Through the dobashis, the Assamese and Manipuri languages penetrated the area while English acquired even more importance as a language of communication as a result of missionary activity. (See Yunuo and Elwin (') for details).

8. Although one can find a varied pattern of hereditary chieftainship, council of elders representing family groups, and elected representatives, among the Nagas, as a general rule the authority of the headman depends on his leadership qualities and on the extent to which he governs in accordance with the will of the community. Violation of this basic democratic requirement can easily result in his deposition by the whole village by a decision arrived at by the village council. The principle of equality and respect for individual autonomy also prevails in the relationship between parents and children. Although there is private ownership of land disparities in ownership are at a minimum, and cooperative work on each others fields, the cooperation of the entire village in the construction of a house and assistance from work teams consisting of the young boys and girls of the village, is the rule rather than the exception. Accumulation of wealth and its perpetuation in a few hands was effectively taken care of in traditional Naga society by the institution of "feasts of merit". The underlying principle of this institution was that the only justification for accumulation can be the demonstration of a willingness to share the wealth with the entire village. Hence, every time an individual achieved some measure of marked prosperity, he was expected to invite the entire village to partake of it and such feasts could sometimes go up to several days depending on the amount of assets accumulated. Such an individual was rewarded by the village through an enhancement of his status reflected in the size and design of his house, the elaborateness of the carvings on it and such other visible symbols. These feasts, which performed an important socio-economic function besides promoting traditional Naga art in the form of wood-work, textiles, etc., were discouraged by the foreign missionaries who objected to the drinking and dancing which accompanied these celebrations.

9. Yunuo, p.125.

10. Although India was by and large an unknown, what little contact had existed in recent times with Assam had only created bitterness due to the exploitative tendency and assumed superiority of the plains Assamese.

11. Yunuo, p.133.

12. To quote from their Report: "The stage of development reached by the inhabitants of these areas prevents the possibility of applying to them methods of representation adopted elsewhere. They do not ask for self-determination but for security of land tenure, freedom in the pursuit of their traditional means of livelihood, and the reasonable exercise of their ancestral customs. Their contentment does not depend so much on rapid political advance as on experienced and sympathetic handling, and on protection from economic subjugation by their neighbours".
Elwin (1) p.36.

13. The Government of India Act of 1919 had brought about this change in designation from 'scheduled district' to 'backward tract'.

14. The principle of their selection was partly backwardness, but, even more, administrative convenience. It was felt that all tribal people needed some kind of protection. Where there was a definite tract of territory inhabited by a compact tribal population it was classified as an excluded area. Where the tribal population was less homogeneous, but was still undeveloped and substantial in number it was classified as partially excluded.

15. See Yunuo, pp.166-170 for details of these schemes.

16. The Nagas however rejected a proposal by Sir Robert Reid, Governor of Assam from 1937-1942 for a Crown Colony comprising the Naga Hills, NEFA, the Chittagong Hill tracts of East Bengal and the Nagas, Chins and Shan States of Burma, over which control would be exercised by Whitehall rather than Delhi.

17. Yunuo, p.175.

18. Ibid. p.177.

19. Promulgation of September 1953.

20. This later became the Naga Nationalist Organisation which formed the first state government.

21. Notwithstanding the ceasefire, however, there was no let-up in the attempts of the Indian security forces to capture underground leaders. Whenever meetings were arranged with prominent leaders by the Peace Mission or the NNO, security forces would surround the village in a capture attempt or harass villagers when the leaders managed to escape. Nor did army raids on NFG camps cease. All this led to NFG distrust of the Government of India's intentions. The NFG also alleged that the army had used the ceasefire to further stabilise itself in Nagaland through the construction of permanent barracks, prisons, etc. National Herald (Delhi), November 8, 1970.

22. As one Naga leader put it: "We are not the enemy of India but any peaceful settlement of the Nagaland problem must be reached with the underground leaders. The present Nagaland government is a puppet government. The government leaders were a team of negotiators on behalf of the federal government. They, instead, entered into an agreement and got statehood. It is like the matchmaker marrying the girl. Statehood has not satisfied Naga aspirations". Tribune (Ambala), November 6, 1970.

23. Chedema, a village five miles from Kohima, had been the headquarters of the NFG before the split. The headquarters of the Revolutionary Government was at Zungti, a village in Mokokchung district.

24. Times of India, August 12, 1972.

25. In March 1972, a Nagaland Peace Observers Team submitted a six-point memorandum to the Governor B.K. Nehru and the NFG, which suggested: (i) that federal personnel without arms or uniform should be allowed free movement (ii) security forces should refrain from entering the villages (iii) the federal personnel should not engage in forcible collection of money or rations (iv) there should be a fresh review of all cases of political prisoners and steps should be taken for their release (v) the Peace Observers Team should have free access to the areas of Manipur included within the scope of suspension of operations (vi) the Team should have two representatives from each party on it. Assam Tribune, March 5, 1972.
26. He had even persuaded the Centre to revoke the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Regulation (1958) and revived the question of the border dispute with Assam, following Jamir's election defeat, to restore NNO prestige and gain the people's confidence.
27. "The notification does remove the immunity with which the overground supporters of the underground have hitherto operated; they will in future become liable to prosecution ... it is abundantly clear that if any of such members (of the legislative assembly) have a hope of being called upon now or in the future by the Governor to become members of the Council of Ministers, they are mistaken. No Governor can ever entrust any person about whose unquestioned and whole hearted devotion to the Constitution and integrity of India he is in doubt, with the responsibility of holding charge of any office of the state." Governor B.K. Nehru, National Herald (Delhi), September 1, 1972.
28. Governor B.K. Nehru declared, ".... we are taking a giant step today towards the establishment of permanent peace in Nagaland. Peace cannot be maintained without obedience to the law; we are today removing the obstacles in the way of enforcement of law". National Herald (Delhi), September 1, 1972.

Another fact which brought home to the government the strength of the underground and the extent to which it enjoyed the sympathy of the people was that even a month after the attack on Sema, there was no trace of the terrorists despite intensive combing operations and burning down of villages. Times of India (Delhi), September 17, 1972.

29. One tactic was to keep declaring that the underground was finished. In September 1973 the ex-Governor B.K. Nehru stated at a press conference that "the Naga insurgency has been contained; it has really ended".
30. It is true that the UDF Ministry was shaky from the start as the independents had come over largely due to the lure of office rather than for ideological reasons. However, in the period that followed, defections were of such an order that eight legislators defected twice, another eight crossed the floor once, while two others switched their loyalties thrice. The Speaker who blatantly transferred his allegiance to the NNO declared the situation to be "unstable" and without giving the UDF the opportunity for a trial of strength, adjourned the House sine die. The purpose of this move was to enable the NNO to emerge the stronger force. Apart from the fact that the NNO had traditionally been hostile to the underground and could be fully relied upon to cooperate with the security forces, the NNO in recent months had also been anxious to formalise its alignment with the Congress Party ruling at the Centre. However, it failed to rise to the occasion. In the meanwhile the UDF resolved its internal differences and just when its leaders were to meet the Governor to reiterate their claim to form a State government, the Assembly was suddenly dissolved and President's Rule firmly established. Statesman (Delhi), March 25, 1975. Tribune (Chandigarh) May 23, 1975.
31. "What is there to settle? If you persist on independence I will have nothing to talk. I will certainly exterminate all Naga rebels and I will have absolutely no leniency. I will certainly exterminate all Naga rebels and I will have no compunction in that." Prime Minister Morarji Desai to A.Z. Phizo in London. Indian Express, June 26, 1977.

32. On the one hand Assam has refused to accept the traditional boundary between Assam and Naga people that existed before the British changed the political geography of the region. As late as 1968-69 Assam has not only laid claim to the reserved forests (see footnote 6) but has occupied them physically before any adjustment can be made. The Assam government has launched a scheme of distributing land to Nepali immigrants and refugees and the established Naga villages are being burnt and destroyed, and the Nagas driven up into the hills and prevented from cultivating their paddy fields. A four battalion strong police force in 25 police posts along the entire stretch of the Assam-Nagaland border protects the new settlers and drives away and harasses the original Naga inhabitants.

On the other hand, Assam has even shown signs of wanting to draw upon pre-British history to suit its expansionist interests. As late as 1972 it laid claim to Dimapur as its territory since the Cacharis built their capital there before they were turned out by the Ahoms. Hindustan Times (Delhi), May 17, 1972.

3137

Assam has opposed the constitution of a Central Boundary Commission. A Sundaram Commission which was appointed in 1971 in the wake of some violent border clashes was supposed to submit its Report in 1972; however the Report is still to see the light of day.

THE SECRETARY
IN CHARGE